

BYLONG COAL PROJECT - IPC MEETING 7 November 2018

Submission by Jolieske Lips

Thank you for the opportunity to address this meeting.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we are meeting today and to pay my respects to the Elders past and present.

I felt compelled to make an individual submission as I feel so strongly how wrong it would be for a greenfield coal mine to open in the beautiful Bylong Valley. I also feel compelled to speak on behalf of the many who have been gagged - those past residents of Bylong, some with a long family history in the area, who after years of fighting this mine, were worn out, worn down and for their own health were forced to move on. But in selling their land to Kepco they also had to sign away their right to speak. They no longer have a voice and so I speak for them as well as myself.

There are many reasons why this mine should not go ahead.

It just does not make sense to start this dirty industry in such good agricultural land. We see the pollution in the Hunter Valley and the impacts of coal mining there. Why expand it into this valuable agricultural land? We talk about the expansion of Australia's population but how will we feed that growing population if we keep trashing our best agricultural land? Australia is a vast country but the percentage of high value agricultural land is small. Why do we keep destroying it? And for a non-essential industry at that. Coal is no longer the only source of energy - it is not essential. What is essential is that we phase out coal as the recent IPCC report has stated. It appears more than cynical that the final DPE assessment report saying this mine was approvable was released on the same day as the IPCC Report on the need to reduce coal dependency.

Another reason not to destroy the Bylong Valley with this coal mine is because of its stunning landscape. The drive through the Bylong Valley has rightly been named one of the best ten scenic drives in Australia. I have worked in the tourism industry all my life and have been enormously privileged to have travelled all over this extraordinary and magnificent country. I can assure you the Bylong Valley is right up

there with iconic places such as the Red Centre, the Kimberleys, the Rainforests and The Reef. Why are we even contemplating putting a dirty coal mine here?

The argument is always jobs. What a furphy this is! Our experience in this region is that the job numbers are always inflated and then comes a drop in coal prices and the jobs quickly diminish even further. But it is only jobs for some twenty years, and no-one ever talks about or balances these new jobs against jobs lost. Jobs in agriculture that have been in the Bylong Valley for over 150 years, and can continue for decades and decades, not just twenty years. No-one balances these new jobs against the economic opportunities lost; the relocation of a horse breeding enterprise and the demise of a tourist accommodation business to name just two. Both are businesses with potential for future expansion, but not with a coal mine here. And no-one has mentioned that already the agricultural production on the land bought by Kepco has already declined by over 30%! (From local 5th generation landholder who knows the valley as well as anyone, but has been gagged from speaking.)

There is hope that all these new jobs will bring many more people into Rylstone and Kandos - or will it be Mudgee? But I seriously doubt it. Some of the new jobs will go to people already living in Kandos and Rylstone who would seek work closer to home in place of the long commute to Ulan and the other Mudgee coal mines. Workers new to the area are more likely to choose the equally distant Denman with its closer access to the major urban centre of Newcastle and the coast. There is absolutely no guarantee all these jobs will create economic benefit for Kandos and Rylstone or Mudgee.

While there is all this talk of new jobs and the money brought into the community, there is no talk of the costs to the environment and the Bylong community. The social costs such as the demise of a healthy vibrant community, its school and the loss of a quintessentially Australian fun fund raising day - the legendary Bylong mouse races that brought many tourists to the region and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years to improve that community - but the community has already been bought off and the Mouse Races finished some years ago when there was no longer enough people left to run the day.

Kepco talks about the \$700million it has spent so far on this project as if that is reason alone for the mine to be given approval. To pay \$400 million for its exploration licence and then to spend millions buying out landholders before it has approval is its own commercial risk and has nothing to do whether this mine should be approved or

not. There are many reasons this mine should not be approved and others will talk in more detail about the unacceptable impact on the water resources, biodiversity and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, and about subsidence and emissions issues.

So I will conclude with a plea for the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage. This is something that affects us all - all Australians, not just indigenous Australians.

I think the Office of Environment and Heritage's concern regarding the impacts of this mine on Wiradjuri heritage has already been quoted.

The cumulative impact of this mine on Wiradjuri heritage was raised as an issue by the Commission but has not been addressed or treated seriously by the Department of Planning or Kepco.

Just over a year ago I saw the film *Gurumul*, about the blind Aboriginal singer. There was a line there that struck me and has stayed with me ever since. As Australians we are all proud of our Sydney Opera House and to paraphrase a line from the film; *If tiles were to start falling off the Opera House and nothing was being done there would be outrage. But everyday we lose tiles from our indigenous heritage and no-one says anything, no-one protests.*

But today I protest. It is time we stopped losing the tiles from our indigenous heritage. This 60,000 years of heritage belongs to all us Australians and the country will be so much poorer as this extraordinary heritage is diminished.

This mine cannot go ahead.